

Consider the Deep – April 24, 2016

Job:38:1-18 and Luke 5:1-11

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As a life-long Midwesterner, my experiences of the ocean have been few and far between. My first sight of the great blue was as an 18-year-old high school marching band member on a trip to Hawaii, and I remember the amazing diversity of the blue and greens of the water. My first sight of the Atlantic occurred on a college band trip to the southeast United States. We performed in several states along the way, and had a brief overnight stay at Ormond Beach, FL. I remember several of us running to the beach at about midnight after our tour buses rolled into the hotel parking lot. We splashed and cavorted in the cold water (it was February) with our jeans rolled up. Of course we were soaked, and we hung our jeans to dry on the railing of our hotel balcony. I remember being rather surprised by the distinct smell when I rolled them up into my suitcase the next morning.

But the most memorable early experience of the ocean was on the beach of Hilton Head Island in South Carolina. This was soon after I had become a Christian, and I was on a spring break mission trip with a group of my new Baptist friends. I remember one evening, sitting alone on the shore for at least an hour, just watching the waves roll in. I was overwhelmed by the continual movement of the ocean. I was literally awestruck by the creative power of God and felt myself getting lost in its immensity.

A recurring biblical theme when large bodies of water are mentioned is that of “the deep.” Oceans and seas were seen as powerful and mysterious, holding within them great sea creatures and much that was not known, especially in the deep. In the passage from Job, just like last week, God is responding to Job’s question of why he has been the victim of so much adversity. In last week’s passage from Job, the subjects of God’s response were the movements and actions of animals. That each animal has its own innate way of being, given to them by God for their survival.

In this previous chapter from Job, God recounts the creation of the earth, pointing out the greatness of the cosmos, in which the earth had its foundation. That it was God who gave it its form and function. God mentions the limits placed upon the oceans and the course of the sun bringing dawn to the earth each day. And God questions Job to see if Job could possibly have the wisdom needed to understand the creation in its enormity. Of course not.

God is showing Job that creation has an ordered structure to it. That there are physical laws set in place that govern how the earth and seas and stars all move and function. Since Job does not understand the workings of the Creation, how could he possibly have the wisdom needed to fully understand the ways of God? Now we might think that with our advances in science and knowledge of physics and geology, botany and oceanography, that we have a handle on how things work. Yet even with our advances in technology, there are aspects of the world that we still don’t understand. And especially in the deepest parts of the ocean where we have yet to obtain access, we are still without knowledge. At least for now, the deep is beyond us.

Looking at our passage from Luke, if the story sounded familiar to you, it should. We looked at a very similar story a few weeks ago in the Gospel of John that was set post resurrection. Where Jesus

appeared on a beach and told some of the disciples to cast their net into the water, on the other side of their boat, and they came back with a huge haul of fish.

Luke places his version of the great catch of fish toward the beginning of his gospel. Here Jesus was standing on the lakeshore teaching a crowd of people. Since the people were pressing in on him, he asked one of the fisherman, Simon, to row him out a little way so he could address the crowd more easily. After he finished, he told Simon to cast out his net into the deep water.

Now Simon knew these waters. He had fished there for years. He knew the patterns of the fish and the best places to catch them. He had been fishing all night and this spot was without fish. But because Jesus had told him to do so, Simon dropped his nets down into the deep water, and then he was amazed at the catch, needing to call out to his friends to help them bring in the nets. Simon then realized that Jesus was much more than a simple teacher, and he fell down at his feet. Jesus told him to not be afraid. That he would be, from now on, catching people.

Notice where Jesus told him to drop his net. In this version of the story, it's not the other side of the boat. Jesus tells him to cast into the deep water. The deep water is the place of mystery, of the unknown. The deep is the place only known to God. And from the deep, the fisherman brings in a huge catch. Somehow Jesus knew. And from that place of mystery, Simon and his friends are given a new calling. No longer would they be catching fish. Now they would catch people for God.

When we think about how water in general is portrayed in the Bible, it is very often referred to as a source of life. In an arid land, that is not at all surprising. The biblical authors understood the importance of water for life. Water was scarce, and sources of water were to be protected. From the waters of the flood came new hope for the earth. The Hebrew people were finally able to escape slavery in Egypt when God parted the water of the Red Sea. They passed through without harm, but their pursuers were drowned when God released the waters. Then when they languished in the desert, God provided water. When Jesus spoke to the woman at the well, he offered her water where she would never thirst. In baptism, water is a symbol of washing away sin and coming up into new life. Without water we would not survive very long.

When water is so abundant, we take it for granted. When I go into the kitchen or bathroom and turn on the tap, I never worry that water will not pour from the faucet. I rarely think about how fortunate I am to have such easy access to fresh water whenever I want it. I don't know anyone who has to walk several miles each day to find and bring home water.

Also, when I think about how the oceans cover two thirds of the earth's surface, it's hard to believe that we could ever have a shortage of water. And perhaps shortage is not the right word. It's more having access to fresh water. If you're like me, thinking about people who don't have access to fresh water is not part of my daily concerns. But maybe it should be.

But when we think about the oceans and other bodies of water, our concern is not just over the availability of fresh water. Water pollution is a huge concern. I'm sure we have all heard about the ongoing crisis in Flint, Michigan, where the tap water is NOT safe to drink. We are perhaps aware of rising mercury levels in our freshwater lakes, and the concern about eating too much of the fish we

catch. And perhaps you've heard of the Great Pacific Garbage Patch – estimates place it at twice the size of the state of Texas, and at points, up to nine feet in depth. Its contents is approximately 80% plastic. (<http://garbagepatch.net/greatpacificocean/garbagepatchfacts/>)

These are just a few examples of the many issues concerning the health of our oceans and other sources of water on earth. Because for us water is so abundant, we don't often think of these and other concerns. May we all become more cognizant of our impact, both direct and indirect, on the water of the earth and open to ways of positive change.